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NETS OF
SPINSTERHOOD



Guy SNOW
LONGLEY

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GIFT OF

Class of 1900



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SONNETS *of* SPINSTERHOOD

SONNETS *of* SPINSTERHOOD

THE SPINSTER'S BOOK *of* DREAMS

DELICATE TRACERIES *of*

DIM DESIRES

By SNOW LONGLEY



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THESE Sonnets need, perhaps, a word of explanation. In a recent reading of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese," the conviction was borne in upon me that the sentiment of love is worthy of expression, whether or not it outwardly finds an object; "for the romantic passion" as a dream, an ideal or a memory is a source of inspiration in every human life. I have endeavored to make the sequence of sonnets show the ideal progress from the personal to the racial, from the love which seeks individual expression to the love for humanity.

Class
1900

PROEM

Light-pencilled in the spinster's book of dreams
Are delicate traceries of dim desires,
That still, at times, give forth their fitful gleams,
Though grayed to ashes with youth's sinking fires;
And sometimes, in life's long, slow afternoon,
She turns the pages, yellowed with the years,
And finds a flower, its petals caught too soon
And here impressèd, stained with gentle tears,
Before the ripe fruit 'neath its heart might bear
The changing mystery of th' enfolded seed,
She smooths its petals with a tender care,
And passes on where errant memories lead.
And with the turning page the quiet room
Holds the faint perfume of life's springtide bloom.

SONNETS 9 SPINSTERHOOD

I.

Spirit of Love, to thee alone I give
These verses which my fancy has set free,
A votive offering on thy shrine to live,
Bound in a golden band of poesy;
And if the flowers fade, the gold prove
dross,
Fling them aside—thou hast no need
of praise;
Nor will another grieve, mine own the
loss,
Since I walk lonely all my earthly days.
But as the vestal maids of old must tend
The altar whence domestic joys took
flame,
So may my incense with thy candles
blend,
So may I tend thy fires in love's own
name,
Content if by my service love may shine
With brighter glow on other hearths
than mine.

SONNETS 9

II.

I may not know thee in life's span, dear
love,
The gray years come to me, and take
their toll
Of youth and hope, and hastening onward
move,
But bring not thee, O comrade of my soul.
At times I've fancied that I felt thee
near,
Or saw thy spirit look from eyes agleam;
But now I know, with later vision clear,
'Twas but the youthful stirring of a
dream.
Yet if our love be mixt, not all of clay,
But has the star-dust mingled with the
mold,
Then shall I find thee on some heavenly
day—
An it be true, as prophets have foretold—
In that far future land beyond the sun,
Where you and I and Life and Love are
one.

SPINSTERHOOD

III.

If I have missed thee, let me not lose
love,
That greater than ourselves which makes
us one,
Toward which the currents of our beings
move,
As the spring flowers uplift them to the
sun.
May every stir of life its music breathe
Upon the listening harp-strings of my
heart,
The rustling oak, the violet blue beneath,
Labor of men in field or busy mart,
Laughter of children, till my heart's own
note
Lose its faint rhythm in life's fuller tone,
And that one string, by primal impulse
smote,
Vibrate to harmonies beyond its own;
Until in universal love comes peace,
Wherein my own heart's yearning finds
surcease.

SONNETS 9

IV.

Not every cloistered nun wears garments dark,
Nor wreathes her pale brow with a band of white,
Full many a tress-crowned forehead bears the mark
Of calm renunciation of love's light.
No tapers burn, no low chant casts its spell,
She does world-service in life's busy mart;
And yet I seem to hear the vesper bell
Faint echo in the cloisters of her heart.
And sometimes, when the day of toil is spent,
She seeks her shrine in sacrificial mood,
And dedicates afresh, with tired head bent,
The votive offering of her womanhood.
Perchance 't is duty, mayhap memory,
This altar where she vows her chastity.

SPINSTERHOOD

v.

'Twas not for me, the crown of mother-
hood,
That blessed boon, that sainted aureole,
Which every woman, in her heart, deems
good,
The highest guerdon of the travailing soul.
And in my heart I have cried out, "O, Lord,
Why to that burdened flesh another
weight
Of weak mortality, when my shoulders
broad,
Unbent, could raise humanity's frail
freight?"
But now I know it is not all to bear
The race, that every mother heart must
bend
To lift the wounded, raise the weight
of care,
Till all mankind enlist as childhood's
friend.
Not mine the banner, Lord, but give
me leave
To wear Thy mercy-cross upon my sleeve.

SONNETS 9

VI.

They cannot know, these other ones who
stand
In the fair shelter of a stronger arm,
The joy it is to steer with mine own hand
My tiny craft through sun or stress of
storm,
To front the world and hear its chal-
lenge ring,
To dare still to be human, being maid,
My richest offering to this day to bring,
And face the mist-veiled morrow unafraid.
As chaste Brunhilde, fire-girt, shrank
to yield
Her warrior glory for love's greater
prize.
So may I keep my dream, till Love,
revealed,
Stands in his might before my waking
eyes.
He must be hero-born who strives to
move
My pulsing heart-beats to the call of love.

SPINSTERHOOD

VII.

There comes to me at times a discontent,
When all that I have counted gold seems
 dross,
Wherein the gain of days in labor spent
Is far outweighed by futile sense of loss;
And little joys, that filled the crannied
 space
In duty's shelt'ring wall 'gainst grim
 despair,
No longer hold for me th' accustomed
 place,
And faint, far winds of passion echo there.
'Tis then I turn me to the thought of
 thee,
And say, "It is my woman-loneliness,
Had I found love, this yearning would
 not be,
Or, being, it would die in thy caress."
And yet, if life must pay the price of
 pain,
Greater the travail for love's greater gain.

SONNETS 9

VIII.

I wonder if these little loves atone,—
These little loves of mutual service
 born,—
For that great rapture that is not mine
 own,
That greatest love of which I live forlorn.
For I am rich in love; the beacon bright
Of friendship calls to me across the dark,
And every passing craft its kindly light
Sends to me from afar in glimmering
 spark.
If I but turn me toward the distant
 shore,
My childhood anchorage shines out afar,
And high above the cloud-rack evermore
Faith can discern the flashing of a star.
These lesser lights gleam bright upon
 my way,
But still my heart cries: "This is not the
 day."

SPINSTERHOOD

IX.

Some women walk the way of life, unwed,
Nor ever lose the yearning for love's
prize;

When early charm and time of hope are
sped,
Still gleams love's sweet expectance in
their eyes.

And others strive to cozen time's decree,
Veiling with artifice the face of truth,
And evermore, with outworn gayety,
Flaunting the tattered banners of their
youth.

But some few wear the crown that life
bestows,—

A laurel leaf for every passing year,
Hid in their breasts a pale, remembered
rose,

And in its heart the dew-drop of a tear.
On their calm brows I see this message
run,

“Lo! I have loved and suffered—it is
done.”

SONNETS 9

x.

Beloved, when we trod love's path that day,
Our day of love so soon to fade in night,
And plucked the flowers upspringing by
the way,
And dreamed our dream in innocent
delight,
We did not know how soon our paths
must part—
You to the highway where the world
goes by,
While I, O God, my aching woman's heart!
Back that same path we trod so joyously
Must drag my lab'ring way without a
moan,
Creeping, yea crawling when my step grew
slow,
To that far country that my youth had
known,
And now my bruised womanhood must
know.
Yet must thy memory fade as fades the
pain,
Gladly I'd bear the cross of love again.

SPINSTERHOOD

XI.

There is one door o' dreams I dare not
 ope,
I sealed it with my tears in years ago,
There buried lie a rapture and a hope;
I turn me not, for life's command is,
 "On."
I may not have the common right to
 mourn,
Nor say to those who love, "I under-
 stand,"
Nor yet to her whose sorrow is new-born,
"Come with me, dear, into the lonely
 land."
But sometimes, under shadow of the
 night,
Comes memory with silent sandals shod,
And leads me back through ways of dim
 delight,
To tread anew the paths my youth has
 trod.
Spirit of love, how sweet thy self must be,
Since such a balm lies in love's memory.

SONNETS 9

XII.

The life I live is not the life I dreamed
In those vague fancies maidens fashion fair,
Wherein romance in 'broidered pattern
 seemed
To hide from view the darker web of care.
No fairy prince has claimed me for his
 own,
No storied castle is my proud abode,
No golden coach my chariot; alone,
I trudge my way along time's dusty road;
Yet, year by year, I find life grown more
 sweet;
As young hopes fade, youth's yearnings
 lose their pain,
Till, as my round of duties grows
 complete,
I should not know which path were loss
 or gain.
So late I find Love, stripped of all
 disguise,
As Life, my prince o' dreams, unseals
 my eyes.

SPINSTERHOOD

XIII.

Dear love, I have no need of thee to-day,
The little vagrant breezes from afar
Blow round my brow and whisper in
 their play
Of that fair land where love and
 summer are.
So to my heart come echoes, faintly
 sweet,
Of all the loves that other lives express,
And in their gladness grows my joy
 complete,
Till I have found in these my happiness.
I love with every lover, breathe the
 prayer
Of every mother by her cradled child;
The maid's vague dreams, youth's ardent
 pulse I share,
And the sweet trust of childhood
 undefiled.
So does the current of my fancies move,
Till, lo! my loneliness is lapped in love.

SONNETS 9

XIV.

When that my day lies heavy, being spent
In tasks wherein I failed, or seemed to
fail,
And all the high hopes of the morn's
intent
Make my small deeds appear of slight
avail,
My tired heart turns to love, and dreams
the dream
That there is found surcease of earthly
woe,
Till reason, spent with strife, is fain to
deem
The heart speaks fair, and lets her say it so.
All other hopes of youth, like vapors,
fade
Before the burning glare of noon-day
heat,
This fair mirage I follow still, afraid
To come too near it lest I lose its sweet.
My one illusion still has power to
bless,—
That love fulfilled is perfect happiness.

SPINSTERHOOD

xv.

I dreamed last night I stood with God
on high,
And saw the centuries glide, like falling
rain,
Into the still pool of eternity,
Whose calm deeps scarcely rippled with
their gain;
And everywhere, in flower and bud and
tree,
In savage beast or stirring of the clod,
In the on-marching of humanity,
I seemed to see life reaching up to God;
And little joys that I had counted great,
And loss of love with all its wealth of
gain,
Seemed less than that my soul drag not
its weight,
Nor stay the age-long welding of life's
chain.
O, God, when self would seek its own
delight,
Renew to me Thy vision of the night.

SONNETS 9

XVI.

I sought for Happiness upon a height
Of rapture in some dream-enchanted isle;
Her rainbow wings just glanced upon
 my sight,
I knew that she was leaving me the while.
I dwelt apart; I builded me a shrine
To meditate upon her presence bright;
But though I long invoked her peace
 divine,
No voice save mine rang out upon the
 night.
With heavy heart I sought the haunts
 of men,
In toil for human needs my days are
 spent,
And when I thought of happiness again,
She stood beside me, crowned with calm
 content.
How true to-day those words of ancient
 writ:
He only finds his life who loses it.

SPINSTERHOOD

XVII.

I have attained unto the shore of peace;
The eddies of unrest below me lie,
And for the blessed calm of pain's
 surcease,
I give the wave's wild crest of ecstasy.
If love's sweet airs blow not about my
 heart,
Serenely sheltered in its sunny cove,
I shall not know the raving storm-wind's
 part,
Nor all the fiercer buffetings of love.
And here the tides of life will ebb and
 flow,
And I may sit and watch them, unafraid,
By the faint glimmer of youth's afterglow,
Tasting the placid pleasures of a maid.
Yet still, at times, the breaker's pulse,
 like fate,
Sounds faint foreboding—it is not too
 late.

SONNETS 9

XVIII.

Forgive this lyric love, O Greater Soul,
These broken words in bands of verses
 strung;
Had life, perchance, giv'n me the common
 dole,
The heart had found itself another
 tongue.
Had little children played about my knee,
And bound my soul in chains of service
 strong,
Or had I heard thy love-tone's melody,
There would have been no grief to give
 in song.
But, while one woman-heart must ache
 alone,
One serve, unsought, self's need or
 common good,
I pray the God of love my minor tone
May voice the yearnings of this sister-
 hood.
For them I bind this rosemary and rue,
Content if low one whisper, "It is true."

SPINSTERHOOD

XIX.

Spirit of Love, if I have silent grown,
And call thy name less often than of yore,
Think not my heart has ceased to seek
 its own,
Nor can unsay thy sweet remembered
 lore.
That glad expectance which with youth
 should die
To rise immortal in love's verity,
Still stirs at times, though youth has
 passed me by,
And seeks fulfillment in reality.
Scorn not, O love, this offering at thy
 shrine,
Thy worshipper dwells in life's twilight
 gray,
And yet the radiance of thy light divine
Keeps in her heart the brightness still of
 day.
Thank God I have not lost the human
 touch;
They only live who love or suffer much.

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